

## Quartet for Four Clarinets

I wrote this piece as my graduation thesis piece from Harvard in the spring of 2000. As such, I wanted to achieve in this piece a real synthesis of many of the fundamental compositional skills I had been working on as a student. My compositional thinking tends to be very harmonically based, so in this piece I especially wanted to try to develop my contrapuntal chops. I studied a good deal of Bach while working on the piece, and the contrapuntal nature of the middle movements owes a good deal to this study.

Another important influence on this piece was jazz music. I had only recently become interested in jazz, and especially in the music of Charles Mingus, and I'd been listening to and studying it extensively. The improvisatory spirit, the singing, very human quality of the melodic lines, and the vitality and energy of jazz was a breath of fresh air for me at a time when classical music was feeling a bit stale. The spirit of Mingus is most obvious in the outer movements, with their swinging, jazzy melodies, but what I learned from studying jazz harmony pervades the entire piece.

One of the composers I admire most is Johannes Brahms, and in this piece I also tried to capture some of the seamlessness and organicism that characterizes Brahms' music. While the piece is in four movements, there are many connections between the movements – melodic, motivic, and harmonic – and the movements are not mere formal constructions, but take the listener on a psychology journey. Thus, though I did intentionally set out to expand my technique and solve particular problems with this piece, and consciously modeled aspects on composers I admire, I was also careful not to let it be merely a pedantic exercise, but to give the piece a dramatic sweep of its own, and, hopefully, to synthesize the various influences into something uniquely my own.